

Going Wholegrain

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(Photo courtesy: Asia News Network)

With rice, brown is better but that is not always so with bread.

“Colour is not an indication that the product consists of wholegrains as bread can be brown because of molasses or other added ingredients. Read the ingredient list to see if it contains wholegrains,” said Koay Saw Lan, the head of dietetics and nutrition services at Singapore General Hospital.

Also, choose products that list wholegrain ingredients first. Examples of such ingredients include wholewheat, brown rice, whole rye, oatmeal, whole oats, bulgur and wholegrain corn.

Switching to a wholegrain diet can be daunting and dietitians advise using slow and steady steps.

Koay said: “A high fibre eating plan is important to health but fibre can have side effects like intestinal bloating and gas.

“When you eat more dietary fibre, you should also increase your fluid intake. Chew more slowly to break down the fibre compounds to make digestion easier.”

While wholegrains may be slightly more expensive than refined products like white rice or flour and often take longer to cook, their health benefits far outstrip such practical inconveniences.

To cook wholegrains like brown rice, it is advisable to soak them in water for at least an hour before cooking. The water in which the rice was soaked can be used for cooking to minimise nutrient loss.

Ashu Datt, a dietitian at Sodexo Singapore, said: “Just add more water when cooking brown rice for it to become softer.”

“It’s a myth that wholegrains require high heat to be cooked. You can cook them in the usual manner but it may take a longer time. Brown rice and wholemeal pasta are cooked in exactly the same way as refined grains,” she added.

Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants, suggested adding herbs and spices when cooking wholegrains.

She said: “The grains absorb more water which means they absorb more flavour from the fluid they are cooked in.”

She also suggested cooking wholemeal pasta in a tomato-based sauce with vegetables like capsicum and mushroom, the natural flavours of which will complement the nutty taste of wholemeal spaghetti.

Instead of using breadcrumbs to batter fish or chicken, boost the dish’s fibre content by using cooking oats or crushed wholegrain cereal.

Another easy way to increase consumption of wholegrains is to substitute half the portion of plain flour when baking with wholemeal flour.

Even wholegrain cereal, which is unpopular due to its dry, cardboard texture and taste, can be enlivened with a little creativity in the kitchen.

Datt said: “If you add three or four teaspoons of sugar to your wholegrain cereal, it defeats the purpose of eating healthily. Sugar should be your last resort.

“You can add honey, fresh fruit or dried fruit like raisins instead to enhance the taste of your cereal.”

[Anatomy Of A Grain](#)

Wholegrains possess all three parts of the grain: the fibre-rich outer layer known as the bran; the central starchy part known as the endosperm; and the nutrient-packed inner area known as the germ.

The bran is rich in fibre, B vitamins and minerals like zinc, iron, magnesium and potassium.

The germ is packed with vitamin E, B vitamins, polyunsaturated fats, trace minerals and phytochemicals while the endosperm contains mainly carbohydrate and protein.

“When wholegrains are refined or undergo a milling process, the bran and germ are removed, reducing the grain’s nutritional value.

“You can fortify it by adding vitamins and minerals but you can never put the fibre back,” said Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

Common wholegrain types are wholewheat, oatmeal, wholegrain barley, wholegrain corn (popcorn), brown rice, red rice, rye, buckwheat, bulgur, quinoa and millet.

When the label says wholemeal, this refers to wholegrains that have been milled to a finer texture but still have the three layers of bran, endosperm and germ intact. *(By June Cheong in Singapore/ The Straits Times/ Asia News Network)*